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ABSTRACT

To address the shortage of special education teachers in rural areas, Indiana University Southeast designed the Electronic Enhancement of Supervision Project (EESP) to integrate technology with supervision training of special education teachers. The goal of EESP is to strengthen the supply and quality of special education teachers through better training of special education cooperating teachers, the critical partners in teacher preparation. Master special educators cooperate with the university to revamp training and support for classroom supervising teachers. Phase 1 prepared three master teachers to supervise/mentor special education cooperating teachers. Phase 1 included training in technologies such as Webcams and discussion listservs. Phase 2 developed a Web site for the program, piloted the technology in schools, and identified six cooperating classroom teachers for Phase 3. Phase 3 will be completed during Spring 2001 as the six cooperating teachers are mentored via listservs by the supervisor-mentors. Phase 4 will develop final conclusions and recommendations. Beneficial aspects of the project focus on the importance of using the expertise of master special education teachers to adapt traditional supervision models to situations specific to special education. Challenges arose surrounding the mismatch of equipment between the university and individual schools and dealing with the technology bureaucracies imbedded in both systems. (Contains 17 references.) (TD)

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## THE ELECTRONIC ENHANCEMENT OF SUPERVISION PROJECT (EESP)

Like their urban counterparts, rural districts can find themselves facing a real and recalcitrant shortage of special education teachers. In a nutshell, too few train, too few seek positions, and too few stay. Improving initial training for those already in the pipeline can contribute to reducing the shortage.

As pivotal teacher preparation components, field experiences are common sense targets for addressing the personnel shortage. Improving these experiences can ensure that those who are in the pipeline stay the course and exit with the skills and confidence to seek and remain in a special education teaching position.

Field experiences typically involve a pre-service teacher, a university supervisor and the classroom supervisor. Because the classroom teacher works directly with the university student, his/her ability to coach the pre-service teacher is critical to the experience. It is precisely these coaching skills that are the focus of a grant project involving P-12 teachers and teacher education faculty from a regional campus of a large university. Two notable features of the project are the use of P-12 master teachers as mentors to other teachers and the utilization of technology including desktop conferencing, webpage, and listserver.

### Review of Literature

In 1998, a task force in Indiana reviewed professional literature and analyzed data regarding recruiting, training and retraining fully certified teachers in special education. Their report, *Who Will Teach Indiana's Children with Special Needs?* corroborate and contextualize the shortage of special education teachers (ISEAS, 1998). Particularly disheartening, as cited by the report, was the number of licensed special educators who do not seek positions or quit after a few years. In rural districts, the loss of just one special educator is significant.

Those who enter the profession leave for numerous reasons, and among those is feeling ill-prepared to handle job responsibilities. Classroom teachers are currently experiencing new, more complex work demands associated with the inclusion movement, a transforming school trend described as "the most significant movement in special education in the past two decades" (Kirk, Gallagher, and Anastasiow, 2000, p. 58).
Each new role brought about by changes in how schools serve students creates new stresses and strains for the special and general education teachers who train new teacher candidates in their classrooms. Consequently, some special education classroom supervisors are faced with modeling and explaining their own, barely emerging, skills to teacher education students. Thus, in fact, the "expert" might feel less the expert but instead the struggling learner him/herself.

Teacher preparation institutions need to be concerned about such difficulties because of their impact on pre-service teachers. The transformation of a college student to a fledgling teacher "does not occur on the college campus under the watchful eye of a professor but in an elementary or secondary school under the direction of a classroom teacher" (Henry and Beasley, 1996, p. 2). Feelings of being less than "expert" potentially compromise the supervising teacher's ability to effectively direct or coach a student teacher. Teachers who lack experience, confidence or self-analysis skills may be ineffective in their abilities to successfully coach their student teachers.

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Though teacher preparation programs have long recognized the need to support and train supervising teachers, the realities in special education pose unique challenges to insuring high quality field experiences. The personnel turnover rate and rapidly expanding job roles require a rethinking of such support and training. Finding ways to support and upgrade the supervision skills of supervising special education teachers, especially when they are at distance from campuses in rural locations, is needed.

Typically, training and support for supervising teachers have been accomplished through providing direct (live) or indirect (printed materials) training about the roles, responsibilities and effective strategies for supervision. Less commonly, an experienced supervisor is assigned to mentor a supervising cooperating teacher.

This practice of pairing a less experienced protégé with a guide has a long history. Mentoring dates back at least to Greek methodology as Odysseus, while fighting the Trojan Wars, entrusted his son Telemachus to his friend and advisor, Mentor. While the mentee receives a thoughtful and objective perspective, the mentor is also strengthened professionally by the relationship (Lightly, 2000; Weeks, 1997).

Another strategy for improving rural supervising teachers' ability to coach pre-service students is to utilize technology. As early as the 1960s, technology was explored as a way to reduce expensive, time-consuming on-site training (Henrie and Whiteford, 1972). Distance education continues to be explored as an effective approach to in-service education (Foegen, Howe, Deno and Robinson, 1998; Wepner, 1997) and has been used with varying degrees of success with special education programs (Spooner, Spooner, Algozzine and Jordan, 1998; Williams, 1995). The advent of web-based technology has brought about new opportunities to hone supervisors' skills in ways that result in better student experiences. These improvements in turn are hoped to result in more confidence and skill for both supervisors and their student teachers.

**A Partnership to Improve Supervision Skills**

The 2000 Ameritech Fellows Grant was designed to partner Indiana University Southeast (a regional public university) with special education teachers in the southern Indiana region. The Electronic Enhancement of Supervision Project (EESP) integrated technology with supervision training of special education teachers in an effort to expand the knowledge base regarding distance education and special education preparation. The goal of EESP was to strengthen the supply and quality of special education teachers through better training of special education cooperating teachers, the critical partners in teacher preparation. Standing apart from other distance learning endeavors, EESP utilized master special educators as mentors to partner and collaborate with the university's training of cooperating teachers. The mentoring emphasis was designed to address the isolation and lack of professional development opportunities often experienced by rural special education teachers. A central aspect of EESP was to capitalize on the skills of master teachers in the P-12 setting to revamp training and support provided to classroom supervising teachers.

The project was comprised of four phases. Beginning in the summer of 2000, Phase I prepared three supervisor-mentor master teachers to mentor special education cooperating teachers. Phase I included training in technologies such as webcams and discussion listserver. Phase II began Fall 2000 to develop a website for the program, pilot the technology in schools, and identify six classroom teachers for Phase III. Phase III will be completed during Spring 2001 with six classroom teachers who will be mentored via listerver by the supervisor-mentors. The six classroom teachers will also receive additional supervision training and support from IUS faculty through webcam, listserver, websites, and site visits. Phase IV was designed to develop final conclusions and recommendations that could benefit others who embark on the endeavor to mentor electronically. The project team included two resident faculty at Indiana University Southeast (IUS), an IUS staff member from the Institute for Learning and Teaching Excellence program, a university student technician, three school-based supervisor-mentors, and six special education cooperating teachers.

Phase I

In Phase I, university faculty worked collaboratively with three master special education teachers to prepare them for the role of "supervisor-mentors" to other special education teachers. The purposes of this phase were to: 1) expand the supervisor-mentors' knowledge about current models regarding supervision and mentoring, 2) empower these mentor teachers to take an active role in the development of the project, including critically analyzing the

concepts and theories used for their applicability to the special needs classroom, 3) experiment with communication technology as an avenue to facilitate mentoring other special education teachers, and 4) identify potential problems linking technology between university and school settings.

Early into the Phase I experience, the supervisor-mentors were each interviewed to gain information about personal beliefs and experiences about mentoring. The interviews revealed that the supervisor-mentors had limited previous training in supervising adults and relied heavily on the only experience they could draw on for this mentoring—personal perceptions of mentoring obtained from their cooperating teachers when they were student teachers. When asked to describe the qualities of a good mentor, each referred to her own student teaching experience when, as a novice, their cooperating teacher had successfully or unsuccessfully contributed to their professional growth. Whether the student teaching experience was perceived as "positive" or "negative," the three supervisor-mentors each referred to her student teaching cooperating teacher as a "model" who was drawn upon as each supervised adults. When the student teaching experience had been perceived as negative, the supervisor-mentor indicated that she was trying not to do what her cooperating teacher had done. If the experience was positive, the supervisor-mentor perceived she was replicating the perceived characteristics of her cooperating teacher when supervising adults in her classroom. Regardless of how long ago the student teaching experience was, each supervisor-mentor acknowledged her student teaching cooperating teacher was influential if not her only model. Another interesting aspect of their pre-service experience is that all three had initially been trained in elementary general education rather than special education.

Phase I provided mentor training, including the following models, theories, and stages believed relevant to field supervision:

- IUS field experience policy (Shea, 1999)
- developmental stages of student teachers (Piland and Anglin, 1993; Slick, 1995)
- communication strategies (Shaw-Baker, 1995)
- models in supervision (Henry and Beasley, 1996)
- characteristics of effective mentoring (Kay, 1990; Portner, 1998; Rowley, 1999)

Phase I included opportunities for the supervisor-mentors to discuss the degree of applicability of these training materials for the special education setting. Drawing on their personal and professional experiences as special education teachers, the supervisor-mentors provided modifications to the models and strategies that they believed would be more effective for addressing challenges in the special education setting.

The supervisor-mentors expressed strong beliefs that the special education classroom presents a number of challenges that call for a different response than what might be appropriate in the regular classroom setting. For example, while it is important for every student teacher to understand classroom policies (e.g., health and discipline) and school procedures within the first few weeks of the student teaching experience, the EESP supervisor-mentors strongly believed that student teachers in special education classrooms are more likely to need this information on "day one" and should probably be given this information before the first week of student teaching. Special education student teachers are often expected to begin working immediately in the special education setting, often with an individual student. Mistakes or misunderstood directions can be catastrophic for special education students on medications or behavior intervention plans. Oversights in the special education services to students may result in official complaints, hearings or litigation. These unique needs were addressed by modifying strategies and models of supervision (see website at http://homepages.ius.edu/LZ/webeesp/web_docs/).

Phase I also involved creating scenarios of issues that special education teachers could encounter with a student teacher. For example, special education student teachers are more likely to face complex interpersonal situations involving working with other teachers in the inclusive regular education classroom and role boundaries of teaching assistants. Though general education student teachers are likely to also experience role boundaries, the special education student teacher often experiences multiple collaborations which they must negotiate. The supervisor-mentors shared that although theoretically collaboration is "owned" by general and special education, it is often the special education teacher who by virtue of monitoring responsibilities feels the weight of keeping the professional relationship afloat.

The supervisor-mentors created short scenarios of issues that could be more problematic in the special education setting and practiced requesting advice via the listserver from the other supervision-mentors and university faculty. One such scenario described a potential conflict between the student teacher and the instructional assistant:

My student teacher recently experienced a problem in dealing with one of our instructional assistants. The assistant directed a student to finish an assignment given to him the previous day. This direction occurred following the student teacher's directive to put away all other work and to complete the assignment just given by her. My student teacher is certain that the assistant heard her make this statement. The student teacher chose not to talk to the assistant and is just stewing about it instead. I have some ideas. What would you suggest?

Phase II

Phase II incorporated additional opportunities to gather input from the supervisor-mentors about the project, keep them updated on new developments, create a website that would include the information provided by these mentors, and link the technology between the schools and university so that "trial runs" could be made. This trial run period was designed to uncover and solve difficulties that supervisor-mentors might also encounter with the six special education cooperating teachers who would join the project the following semester during Phase III.

The three supervisor-mentors were continually encouraged to think critically about the strategies and models reviewed, analyzing them for applicability to the special education setting. This information was included in the development of the website. Challenges to creating the website included finding the most effective way to capture the " collective voice" of the supervisor-mentor teachers' suggestions and display this information so that it could be easily accessed by other busy special educators supervising student teachers.

The greatest challenges of Phase II included both technology and human elements. The technology issues included mismatches of equipment between the university and individual schools, unusable machines, firewalls, and transmission quality. The human issues were: 1) participating teachers who had competing school responsibilities that diverted their attention away from responding via e-mail and listserver to weekly updates and queries about the EESP project, and 2) untangling the technology in the maze of university and P-12 bureaucracies that were imbedded in both systems.

Questions that were dealt with during this phase included:

- How much time can we realistically expect from the three supervisor-mentors for mentoring of other supervising teachers when there are no accommodations made for any type of release time for the project? (e.g., Our supervisor-mentors told us during Phase I that they are often the last to leave their classrooms, receiving no additional compensation for record keeping that necessitates their longer day.)
- What can we learn about linking universities to school corporations given the bureaucracy that exists at both ends?
- How do transmission imperfections and lag time affect the communication process?
- Who are the key P-12 decision makers who authorize the "chain of events" to get the technology in place?

Phase III and IV

Phase III was designed to provide electronic communication between special education classroom teachers, the three trained supervisor-mentor teachers, and the two IUS faculty. The technology utilized webcam, listservers, e-mail, and a website with additional special education supervision training materials. More information will be forthcoming at the completion of Phase III and the final review in Phase IV.

**Implications**

EESP is a collaborative project that can be adopted or adapted to other special education programs. The technology-based mentoring holds potential for learning, maintaining and updating supervision skills of P-12 teachers supervising pre-service teachers.

Beneficial aspects of the project identified from Phase I focus on the importance of using P-12 master teachers to collaborate with university faculty on aspects of program development including performance-based changes. Asking teachers to utilize their expertise as special education teachers to adapt traditional supervision models affirms practitioners' shared responsibility for teacher preparation and provides a "reality check" for university faculty.

The second implication that Phase II of this grant provides at this time is the issue surrounding the bureaucracy that has grown up around technology, in both P-12 and university settings. The weight of bureaucracies is exacerbated by either too few or too many rules and guidelines, all good intentioned. In the scheme of things, a project of significant importance to two university faculty members can pale in comparison with the issues and day-to-day challenges experienced in P-12, and vice-a-versa. An uneven valence of urgency can produce dissatisfaction on both sides, neither side being wrong in their priorities. The technology bureaucracies in these institutions may serve as one more challenge that schools of education may encounter when trying to strengthen partnerships with our rural education practitioners.

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